DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 070 439 JC 730 012

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TITLE	Proposal Writing: Reactions of an Evaluator.
INSTITUTION	Los Angeles Trade-Technical Coll., Calif.
PUB DATE	11 Nov 71
NOTE	4p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Community Colleges; *Evaluation Criteria; Guides; Post Secondary Education; *Project Applications; *Technical Writing
IDENTIFIERS	*Proposal Writing

ABSTRACT

Because community college proposals have been found inadequate in many cases, suggestions are made for the improvement of future proposals by these colleges. The suggestions are as follows: (1) Meet the Criteria--read carefully the restrictions and guidelines; (2) Present Specific Facts and Plans--list specific classes, forums and seminars identified as to topic, cost and duration; include supporting material such as newspaper articles or any other evidence that the stated need of the community does indeed exist; (3) Make Proposal Development a Year-Round Effort--communication with community and college personnel should be on a continuing basis in regard to needs; a "proposal bank" should be maintained that reflects community needs; (4) Propose Economic Solutions to Problems--don't propose an activity that entails a high unit cost per participant if the same activity can be carried out at local colleges or universities for a lesser cost; be wary of the use of high-paid consultants in the proposed work; (5) Document the Involvement of Persons and Institutions--include supporting material such as letters or resolutions from other institutions that might participate in the proposed work; if the proposed project depends upon key personnel, include resumes giving their qualifications; (6) Triple Check Your Figures; and (7) Check Out Proposal on Campus before Submitting It for Funding--submit your proposal to several persons for editing and reactions. (DB)

ED 070439

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PROPOSAL WRITING: REACTIONS OF AN EVALUATOR

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"Community college proposals are not as well done as some others," declared Dr. Marie Y. Martin, Specialist in Community College Education, United States Office of Education at the recent annual conference of the California Junior College Association.

"Community college proposals are amateur efforts by and large; they suffer when compared to the efforts of state colleges, universities, and private colleges," was my summary jotted down after reading a two-foot stack of proposals for the Coordinating Council for Higher Education earlier this year. It is obvious that Dr. Martin and I are in agreement.

Dr. Martin indicated that some proposals were basically deficient, citing one reader's opinion that a particular proposal "had no soul" and another's that a proposal looked like "an in-house solution to an out-house problem."

I found inadequacies ranging from the fatal flaw of not meeting the criteria for funding to amusing lapses, which might be illustrated by several that proposed "new, innovative programs" (you must admit that some of the so-called innovations that have been reported are old at that).

After logging and analysing the weaknesses of many community college proposals, I would make the following suggestions for the improvement of future efforts:

Meet the criteria. Be sure that the proposal meets the criteria of the funding agency. Careful reading of the restrictions and guidelines is essential; as the old gag goes, when all else fails, follow the directions. Some colleges submitted proposals to the C. C. H. E. that would

have funded project for their own students and faculty under an act designed for off-campus, community programs. Such proposals would be funded only in the unlikely event that not enough proposals were available that met the stated objectives--and even then the funding agency might prefer to withhold the funds.

Present specific facts and plans. Evaluators will pick a proposal that lists specific classes, forums and seminars identified as to topic, cost, and duration over one that simply proposes to offer such programs on topics to be determined, at indeterminate cost, for an unknown length of time. A proposal for a program for the disadvantaged in the community that is identified as having been designated by particular private or governmental agencies as being a high unemployment, low income, or economically distressed is more likely to be funded than is one for another area that is in similar straits, but for which the claims to need are indefinite and not verified by an agency other than the college requesting funding. One college strengthened its proposal considerably by including reprints of articles from a major metropolitan newspaper about the needs in the community.

Make proposal development a year-around effort. Communicate with community contacts and college personnel regarding community and college needs on a continuing basis; keep a "proposal bank."

A few years ago I went to Mrs. Hope Holcomb, dean of college development at Los Angeles City College, with the suggestion that we submit a Title I, HEW Community Services proposal. Hope went into her proposal file, pulled out a suggestion that we have a vehicle similar to a mobile library to take counselors into the community. City College's successful Mobile Advisement Center was developed from this suggestion.

Another college submitted a proposal that contained minutes of meetings that were held with community representatives six months prior to the

time that the proposal was presented for funding. Their idea was not something that was suddenly thought of upon the receipt of forms from the government, but it was the result of a genuine community need discovered in the course of continual communication with community representatives. Needless to say, this strengthened the proposal.

Propose economic solutions to problems. Don't plan to offer seminars for small groups to be taught at a high unit cost per participant if you are in an area where training in the same subjects could be subsidized at local colleges or universities for a lesser cost through enrollment in regular classes (examples might be classes in systems development, sensitivity training, or data processing).

The California Joint Legislative Audit Committee recently criticized the excessive use of consultants. I suspect that they are justified in their criticisms. As an evaluator, I react negatively to proposals that include high-paid consultants, particularly if they will be people who would not ordinarily command the high fees proposed. I also have to be convinced of the necessity of flying in experts from other parts of the country, in light of the fact that we have experts on everything known to man residing in California (my Western Chauvinism is showing).

Document the involvement of persons and institutions. If your proposal is going to involve a consortium of three colleges, place letters confirming their involvement from the presidents of the three colleges in the appendix; better still, include copies of resolutions of support, necessary funding, and involvement from the three boards of trustees.

If your project's strength depends somewhat upon the involvement of key personnel, include short resumes. Projects, not people, are supposed to be funded, but a panel may be positively influenced by the fact that a person with outstanding qualifications or one who has successfully implemented previous programs or had other successes is going to be involved in the program under consideration.

Triple check your figures. One college submitted a proposal that included a position for part-time that would have yielded an annual income of over $50,000 if projected to full time. Others included budgets that just did not balance.

Check out the proposal on campus before submitting it for funding. In the absence of an office of college development or a research department (both of which would pay for themselves in terms of projects funded as a result of their efforts on many campuses), submit your proposal to several persons for editing and reactions. Ask your best English or journalism instructor to check out the spelling, word usage, and general language qualities. Have your bursar or business manager check the budget. Take it to a couple of disinterested persons and ask them to read it and tell you candidly whether they would fund it if they were hired as consultants to evaluate it (don't ask subordinates or those who would be afraid to give you a candid answer).

All of the above is not to suggest that the fanciest proposals will be funded. What is attempted is to convey the fact that a panel of evaluators will have to select proposals in a competitive situation (and they always are competitive) that meet the criteria for funding, that are specific about what is proposed, that are not last-minute, wild inspirations, that are economic in what they propose to do, and that are well documented and fiscally sound. If more of us will evaluate our own proposals according to these criteria, there is at least one evaluator who believes that more of our proposals will be funded.

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